

City of Prairie du Chien  
Crawford County  
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-302

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12-PRACH,  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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## INTRODUCTION

This historical and architectural survey and inventory was undertaken in partial fulfillment of the obligations of the St. Paul District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, regarding cultural resources, set forth in the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (P.L. 91-190), Executive Order 11593 for the Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment (13 May 1971, 36 C.F.R. 8921), the Archaeological Conservation Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-291), the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's "Procedures for the Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties" (36 C.F.R., Part 800), the Department of the Interior's guidelines concerning cultural resources (36 C.F.R., Part 60, and Interim Regulations Parts 32, 60, 61, 63, 64, 65, 66) and the Corps of Engineers Regulation (ER 1105-2-460), "Identification and Administration of Cultural Resources" (Federal Register, 3 April 1978).

Because of a long history of high water capped by the devastating flood of 1965, the current flood control project at Prairie du Chien calls for the removal of all residences from the designated floodplain area. Some buildings are being relocated by their owners or purchasers, and the rest are slated to be demolished. The purpose of this study is to identify which structures might be eligible for inclusion on the National Register, and therefore are of sufficient historical value to be preserved in place. A secondary objective, encouraged by the Historic American Buildings Survey, is to inventory and record all the structures from a historical/architectural point of view. In view of their imminent demolition, an inventory of all the buildings over fifty years old is justified, although they may not merit actual preservation or detailed recording.

The project area is limited to the floodplain as determined by the Corps of Engineers. This area includes the entire Island of St. Friole with certain exceptions. Five structures and their outbuildings, by virtue of having been declared National Historic Landmarks, are already listed on the National Register and are therefore exempt from this study: Villa Louis, American Fur Warehouse, Brisbois House, Rolette House, and Dousman House (see figures 1-5). In addition, only two businesses, both taverns dependent on walk-in trade, are included in the flood control project; other industries on the island, such as the gravel pit and the lumberyard, are exempt from this study. Historically known as the main village, the Island of St. Friole is popularly referred to as the Fourth Ward. The project area also includes the lowest lying portions of the city's mainland, which stretch nine blocks north of Blackhawk Avenue, and sixteen blocks south, but only two blocks east of the river (see map 6).

Because this study is concerned with extant buildings, much of Prairie du Chien's frontier past is irrelevant to the present survey. Instead, this study is concerned with the development of Prairie du Chien from a trading post to a city, from 1820 to 1875. In those years, Prairie du Chien grew from an outpost on the Mississippi, dependent largely on the fur trade for subsistence, to an incorporated city accessible to a transportation network.

Also during that time, the large French land holdings were subdivided and platted into the blocks and lots we know today. After 1875, Prairie du Chien declined gradually, being supplanted by St. Paul in importance, and little new construction was undertaken in the project area.

This study involves this nineteenth century history, of which so little has been written. In many ways, the buildings themselves are the best guides to the past, from frontier construction to high style, or lack of it. Each building over fifty years old is recorded herein, with a photograph, written description, and indication of construction date. Each building built before 1876 is further recorded with a more complete history in which the owners and personalities are defined, and probable construction dates pinpointed.

This study also includes a brief history of the urban development of Prairie du Chien, important to an understanding of the architecture. A section on the types and styles of architecture in the project area attempts to explain the influences on the vernacular. And, finally, recommendations for development of the island as a historic resource, as well as interpretation of the preserved buildings, are made.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Individual inventory cards of each structure are in the field records. The maps referred to in this report have been lost.

METHODOLOGY

The identification of structures within the project area that are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places was based on the evaluation of properties in accordance with the criteria established by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service of the Department of the Interior. The criteria for evaluation are as follows:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and

- A. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The National Register criteria are written in a manner broad enough to encompass the variety of cultural resources found within the United States. They emphasize the selection of structures which are of merit either for their architectural or aesthetic quality or for their association with personalities or events of historic and cultural significance.

In applying these criteria to the structures found within the project area, it was necessary to analyze the buildings on these two levels. Prairie du Chien's early historical significance as an outpost in the Old Northwest Territory in the early nineteenth century is recognized nationally. Therefore, stress was placed on identifying structures that qualified for the National Register within the context of this early historic significance. Though the early period of this area's history was stressed, the study did not limit itself to that era alone. Effort was made to expand the period of significance and to explore events and personalities of local importance to the development of Prairie du Chien and in particular to the development of the Main Village, the earliest area of settlement and continual inhabitation. Emphasis was also placed on judging the relative merit of the local architecture and building techniques and placing these styles within the context of this city's historical development.

The report prepared by Edgar S. Oerichbauer in 1976, Prairie du Chien: A Historical Study, was used initially to outline the work to be done in surveying the properties within the project area. Oerichbauer's study

examined the archaeological importance of this area and provided an excellent historical synopsis of the early settlement of Prairie du Chien. His brief survey of structures within the project area provided valuable information on probable structures of interest. Oerichbauer's main contribution to the present survey, however, was his documentation of the early appearance of this city as reported by various visitors and travellers whose observations were recorded in the literature his study revealed. His study provided little help in dealing with the vernacular structures so prevalent within the project area. As commented on before, the majority of structures of interest in the project area are the product of the mid-nineteenth century, not the early period of settlement that his study researched so exhaustively. Historical studies of Prairie du Chien tend to pay little attention to the period of growth between 1820 and 1875, in that they concentrate on the French influence and frontier role of the city. Peter L. Scanlan's work, Prairie du Chien: French, British, American, is an excellent study of the early development of the town but he too neglects the later events of local significance on which this survey was so dependent. Stored in the Area Research Center in Platteville, Wisconsin, his papers are referred to in this paper by file box number; the book, by page number. It was fundamental to this report that the development of Prairie du Chien, and in particular, the growth of the project area, be more fully researched and documented if the historical associations of the present structures were not to be neglected.

In researching the urban development of the project area, several primary sources were invaluable. Two maps of Prairie du Chien, an 1870 bird's-eye view and an 1876 map showing subdivisions and locations of existing structures, were used extensively in documenting early structures and growth patterns. Tax records from 1857 to the present were also used to determine the age of structures and to pinpoint building dates. The most important information on the development of the project area in the nineteenth century, however, was gathered from the deed records maintained in the Crawford County Courthouse. By preparing title searches of the Main Village lots, the original land divisions granted to the earliest settlers by the United States in 1820, a complete history of the changing land ownership of the project area was obtained. These histories illustrate the gradual subdivision of the land and the pattern of settlement and growth within the project area.

In order to determine the importance of the personalities uncovered by the lot histories and associated with structures in the project area, several local histories were consulted. John C. Gregory's Southwestern Wisconsin: A History of Old Crawford County discussed the achievements of numerous Prairie du Chien natives during the nineteenth century. The History of Crawford and Richland Counties, compiled in 1884, provided biographies on local notables and documentation of events of local significance. Interviews with local historians also identified important individuals and events. Don Munson, Curator of the Villa Louis, and Criffith Williams, President of the Crawford County Historical Society, contributed significantly to an understanding of the personalities and events that shaped the present day Prairie du Chien during the nineteenth century.

Research into the urban development of Prairie du Chien in the nineteenth

century was augmented by careful architectural analysis of the structures in the project area. This analysis was aided by several works dealing with local and regional architectural styles. Lee Budahl's master's thesis was carefully reviewed because it is the only guide to Prairie du Chien architecture. Though her work did not deal specifically with structures within the project area, it nevertheless provided a good overview of architectural styles prominent throughout the city. Rexford Newcomb's Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory offered insights into pioneer structures typical of this region and described in detail early building techniques. The Architecture of Wisconsin, written by Richard W.E. Perrin, the leading authority on this state's architecture, was of little use to the study because it neglected modest vernacular architectural styles. Other articles of interest suggested by the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office specifically relating to early building techniques, and in particular, log house construction, were reviewed when available. It became obvious, however, that a serious study of these types of structures in Wisconsin remains to be done.

On-site inspections of structures within the project area were also made to examine their architectural style and construction technique. Only the exteriors of most of the structures were examined due to the great number of interior alterations that have occurred due to repairs of flood water damage. The interiors of those structures of particular interest were inspected and, in some cases, controlled demolition was carried out to determine building material or technique. So many structures are still inhabited that it was impossible to do an adequate amount of fabric analysis. Destructive testing as houses are vacated will have to be an ongoing project.

HISTORY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The pattern of urban development in Prairie du Chien is as important as the buildings themselves. Prairie du Chien's growth was influenced by several factors. There was a constant struggle among speculators who wanted development to occur on their land, and different parts of town often seemed to be in competition with each other. Eastern United States entrepreneurs, who favored immediate subdivision and development, differed from the French Canadians, who preferred to retain ownership of large sections of land. It was these French settlers, however, who owned the riverfront property that largely controlled the economy of Prairie. In the early nineteenth century, Prairie du Chien was important as a fur-trading center and military outpost. Both of these industries diminished in importance as the century progressed, but Prairie's excellent location, near the confluence of two rivers, continued to make the city significant as a major crossroads in the early frontier transportation network. Prairie's role in this transportation network illustrates why the city developed. How it developed is seen in the history of intra-city transportation. When a section of land was subdivided and developed, and when certain streets were laid out, determined how the land was used: both what kind of buildings were constructed and who built them. Therefore, the following brief history of Prairie du Chien emphasizes the way it developed as a city.

Soon after Marquette and Joliet discovered the upper Mississippi in 1673, a French settlement was established at Prairie du Chien. The exact location of this outpost is not known, but it is thought that a fort was built on the mainland on the south side of the present town, and then, during the French and Indian War, moved to a site north of town. The first permanent white settlement, however, did not occur until 1781 (Oerichbauer, 74), and it was on the island that partially comprises the project area. While Oerichbauer has ably amassed descriptions and travelers' reports of this early village, it is not until 1820 that the first definite record of the settlement appears.

In 1820, Isaac Lee arrived in Prairie du Chien to record land claims. By interviewing the residents and requiring two witnesses to each claim, Lee was able to acquire the record of ownership that appears in the American State Papers, which were used by the U.S. Government in formally granting land titles. His map of that year (map 1) shows main village lots which run perpendicular to the Mississippi River, from the river on the west to the Marais de St. Friole in the east. Farm lots cover the prairie, running from the river or marais east to the bluffs. In addition, there are small upper village lots carved out of the farm lots. In 1828, Lucius Lyons, U.S. Surveyor, redrew this map (map 2), this time measured to scale. He also drew in nine little houses, one on the west end of each main village lot south of Fort Crawford. In addition, there are five houses on the prairie, although the number of houses should be seen as suggestive, not representative.

In locating their houses near the banks of the river, these early settlers were responding to the topography, as the highest ground on the island, with the exception of some mounds, is found there. Also, the island has the best

access to the river in the Prairie du Chien area, and throughout the nineteenth century, business relating to river traffic located there. So by building their houses, fur warehouses, and stores close to the river, these settlers were setting a pattern that would be followed throughout the century.

The census of 1820 showed 492 inhabitants at Prairie du Chien: 361 civilians and 131 assigned to the military garrison (Smith, 163). Visiting in 1820, Schoolcraft reported: "It consists of about eighty buildings, including the garrison, the principal parts of which are of logs arranged in two streets parallel with the river....The village has the old and shabby look of all the antique French towns on the Mississippi..." (Oerichbauer, 92). It was a French-dominated community, in which the island served as the main center of inhabitation while the adjacent mainland was used for farming and grazing. Most of the inhabitants were involved in the fur trade with the Indians. Practically, the only American institution at Prairie du Chien was the log Fort Crawford, situated at the northern end of the village lots, built by the Americans in 1816 (Scanlan, 123).

In 1821, the borough of Prairie du Chien was incorporated, and some laws were instituted and some streets laid out. Joseph Rolette, a French Canadian fur trader, donated land in the rear of village lot 17 for a courthouse and jail, but only the jail was built. Just two years later, there was an effort to build a courthouse on the mainland. In 1823, James Duane Doty, appointed U.S. judge for Crawford and two other counties, as well as the first postmaster, came from Mackinac to Prairie du Chien where he intended to make his home. Doty was instrumental in getting Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan to designate Prairie du Chien as the county seat of Crawford County. The location for the courthouse that Doty preferred was opposed by other residents. Doty had bought farm lots 33 and 34, and proposed to locate the courthouse on a large mound on these two lots. "In consideration of probable increase in value of lots from the erection of public buildings" (Deed Book A, page 83), he donated eighteen acres to the county for that purpose. Other residents objected, however, feeling that Doty was trying to remove the government from the stronghold of French Canadians on the island (Scanlan, 189, and box 5). Besides, Rolette had already donated land for a courthouse on the island. Doty left Prairie du Chien in May, 1824, and in 1825 (A/137), he sold farm lots 33, 34, and 35, excepting the portion he had donated to the county, to Joseph Rolette. The price was "one yoke of oxen and five heifers three years old with calf."

A map drawn in 1829 to locate a new site for Fort Crawford shows the settlement of Prairie du Chien (map 3). Twenty-five buildings are indicated in the main village, all clustered near the river, and fifteen buildings are shown in the mainland Village of St. Friole. In addition, a drawing of that year (fig. 7) shows that log Fort Crawford dominated the view from the river, with a cluster of one-story buildings to the south. Behind them stands a single building that may represent the jail, and in the distance, a group of buildings in the Village of St. Friole.

In 1829, the U.S. Army, after several years of indecision and dissatisfaction

with the island site of Fort Crawford, ordered that a new site be found for the fort. Poor health conditions due to regular flooding of the island were the prime objection to its previous site. The new site chosen was the same that James J. Doty had hoped would be the site of his courthouse. Construction of the fort, a limestone rock structure, commenced in the early 1830s and the garrison was formally transferred in 1832 (Oerichbauer, 95).

With the movement of Fort Crawford to the mainland, the commercial activities that supported it were forced to move as well. The Village of St. Friole, to the north of the new Fort Crawford and bounded by the marais on the west and what is now Beaumont Street on the east, increased in size and importance. The Americans did not choose to settle in the main village among the largely French and Indian inhabitants, and the Village of St. Friole became known as "New Town" or "American Town." Whereas in 1828 it had only five structures, it soon became a major residential area that contained two stores and an inn (Oerichbauer, 96). In 1835, a courthouse was erected amidst the growing New Town settlement. In the same year, St. Gabriel's Church was begun by Father Mazzuchelli, two blocks north of the courthouse site. Catholic parishioners in the main village were provided access by a foot bridge at the present site of the Washington Street bridge.

By 1836, the main village was definitely considered a declining area, if not a slum. Strange Palmer, a visitor to Prairie du Chien in that year, commented on the town's appearance: "Old Town...was exclusively occupied by the store and warehouse, a large and elegant stone structure, and other buildings of the North American Fur Company, with a few mean huts tenanted by a miserable set of French and Indians.....On the opposite side of the bayou, or 'New Town', was Fort Crawford in which were about 300 U.S. troops.....The 'New Town' contained but few dwelling houses, and those of a very ordinary character -- the only one of any pretensions, which I recollect, being that occupied by Judge Lockwood" (WHC 6:305). In 1835, C. F. Hoffman described the old main village as a group of "...rude and ruinous dwelling houses, which were almost black with age....." (Oerichbauer, 96).

The 1830s were a turbulent period for Prairie du Chien. The Winnebago uprisings and the Black Hawk Wars severely affected the fur trade and thus the economic livelihood of the original settlers, and may explain the decline of the main village. As the Indians were subdued and the virgin farmlands of Iowa and Minnesota appeared more hospitable, however, immigrants from the east began to flood Prairie du Chien on their way west. Many of these immigrants chose to settle in Prairie, and the American sympathies of these newcomers accelerated this decline of the main village as they moved into New Town and into areas south of Fort Crawford. Until modern times, the island retained a concentration of French descendants unlike any on the mainland.

The influx of agricultural immigrants gave rise to land speculation fever in Prairie du Chien during the late 1830s. Large tracts of land to the south were bought by New England speculators and sold off to new arrivals. An early speculation group was the Prairie du Chien Land Company Number One which began subdivision of its holdings in 1837.

A letter written by a prominent resident, H. L. Dousman, characterized the era of this feverish speculation: "We are overrun here with land speculators, sharpers, etc., etc. They are buying up the whole country--they have got the people here perfectly delirious--there are two or three opposition towns in contemplation on the Prairie alone--I have lost at least 8 to 10 thousand dollars by selling out my land a few weeks ago--but I don't despair of making it out of them yet before they get rid of me" (Scanlan, 200).

As if to reaffirm the viability of the old main village, three showplace houses, two of them still standing today, were built there at about 1840 by three of the most prominent families. In 1842, Bernard W. Brisbois, the son of Michael Brisbois (who had been the leading businessman of Prairie du Chien during the first years of the nineteenth century), built a large two-story stone house on the banks of the Mississippi (fig. 2). Joseph Rolette, the aging fur trader whose cleverness and business acumen had earned him the respect of the French community, built on a lot to the south of this stone house a two-story frame structure with brick nogging for his daughter (fig. 3). Both of these structures were unusually pretentious for the main village and Prairie du Chien as a whole, but in comparison to the home erected by H. L. Dousman, they were small. In 1843, Dousman, who had originally come to Prairie du Chien as John Jacob Astor's partner in the American Fur Company and then had expanded his dealings into land speculation and other business pursuits, built the first Villa Louis to the north of Brisbois' house on the site of old Fort Crawford. Constructed in the Georgian style with red brick imported from St. Louis, it was an imposing mansion with extensive grounds. The sudden appearance of these three structures during the early 1840s changed the aspect of the main village completely. Where previously it had been a cluster of blackening, aging log structures, decayed by floods, it suddenly became the site of the most imposing and attractive homes in the region. Despite the location of several businesses on Water Street, including those owned by landholders E.W. Pelton, T.A. Savage, and B.W. Brisbois (May 8, 1850 Prairie du Chien Patriot), commercial growth, however, centered around the Fort and New Town.

The boom years of the late 1830s were followed by near economic collapse of the town in the 1840s. During this decade, the Indian tribes were moved west, beyond the Iowa farmlands, and the fur trade on which Prairie du Chien had been dependent for so many years dissolved. In 1849, the garrison at Fort Crawford was transferred and the fort abandoned. With the departure of the garrison, the businesses and individuals that had depended on the military presence at Prairie du Chien left as well. The population of the town dropped considerably and visitors reported vacant homes, stores, and warehouses throughout the city (Oerichbauer, 96).

The immigrants continued to move west through Prairie because they depended on the ferries located there to cross the Mississippi. As early as the 1820s, Jean Brunet ran a ferry from a site near his tavern at the west end of the main village lot 19. As late as 1930, George Aubin ran a ferry from the same site. Between these two dates, numerous ferries were run from different sites in and near Prairie to Iowa. In 1837, Alexander McGregor was granted a ferry license from a site south of Prairie to Sioux Coulee in Iowa, which soon

became the town of McGregor (Scanlan, box 5). Joseph Schafer, in an article entitled "Ferries and Ferryboats" (WMH 21:454), states that McGregor's ferry departed from Wisconsin at a site south of the mouth of the Wisconsin River. At one point, immigrants, then flooding the area in a westward move, waited in a line that stretched nine or ten miles back, with only a few teams moving each day.

In 1843, B. W. Brisbois was granted a license to run a ferry from the main village to the mouth of the Yellow River in Iowa (Scanlan, box 5). In 1858, John Lawler and Z. M. Sherwin both applied for a ferry license from Prairie to McGregor, but Alexander McGregor sent such a strong remonstrance that their application was rejected (Scanlan, box 5). At about this time, however, Lawler bought McGregor's ferry (Flaherty, WMH 24:143), and changed the source of power to steam. Previously, ferries had been powered by mules or horses working a treadmill. Schafer (21:443) states that the earliest ferry at Prairie was powered by a single mule. The May 16, 1849, Prairie du Chien Patriot observed that "a new ferryboat has been procured for the upper ferry at this place. It was built at Rock Island, arranged for two horses, and is a neat, safe, and fast running little craft" (WMH 21:443).

The 1850s brought prosperity to Prairie du Chien after the economic slowdown of the 1840s. In 1852 it was announced that Prairie du Chien had been selected as the western terminus for the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad (Oerichbauer, 97). The anticipated economic revival of the city spurred growth as people returned to the town. Speculation that the rail depot would be built on the mainland at the south end of town led to an increase in the number of residents in the Lowertown area. When in 1857 the train finally did arrive in the city, the depot was located in that area and dock facilities for grain boats and an elevator were constructed there. That same year a building boom occurred with approximately 327 new structures reported under construction, 141 of which were in the Lowertown area (Oerichbauer, 141). Though the island shared little of this prosperity, the arrival of the railroad in Prairie du Chien accelerated the growth in population and economic vitality returned to the area. The population of Crawford County increased dramatically, from 3323 in 1855, to 8068 in 1860.

It was during the 1850s that Prairie du Chien began to resemble the present city. The 1850 census lists 1407 people in Prairie, with 305 dwelling houses, of which 235 were owner-occupied. In 1853, both the main village and the upper village, or New Town, were officially platted, although by this time it was fully recognized that the upper village was no longer an adjunct but now the heart of the city. Streets were laid out at this time, and it would perhaps be worthwhile at this point to return to the 1820s and look at the first streets.

In 1822, officers of the Borough of Prairie du Chien laid out three streets in the main village. Main Street ran beside the Mississippi and parallel to it. Street No. 1 ran east-west between main village lots 16 and 17, and became the present day Fisher Street. Street No. 2 also ran east-west, between main village lots 24 and 25. This site was changed when the bridge

was built in 1857 to its present location between lots 25 and 26. First called Bridge Street, it is known as Blackhawk Avenue. The rest of the streets in the main village were not laid out until the main village was platted in 1853.

On the mainland, the Old Indian Trail ran north-south close to the shore. As early as 1820, another north-south road, running along the east ends of the upper village lots, approximated today's Beaumont Road, first called Church Street. In 1834, Samuel Gilbert and Ezekiel Tainter laid out a road between farm lots 31 and 32, belonging to Julien Lariviere and Jean Marie Querie, which ran east into the bluffs and was called Bluff Street. In 1930, the name was changed to Blackhawk Avenue.

Complementary to the streets is the history of the bridges that attempted to link the main village to the mainland. A bridge over the Marais de St. Friole was proposed as early as 1824, and Jean Brunet was contracted to oversee its building, but there is no evidence that it was ever built. In this year, Scanlan finds three crossings of the marais that are indicated. One is at Lariviere's or the site of the present Washington Street bridge; one is at the present Blackhawk Avenue bridge, and the third is two blocks south of it. In low water, the marais could be forded, and in high water, boats were used.

In 1837, the county commissioners again voted to build a bridge across the marais. Julien Lariviere was contracted to build a stone bridge 120 feet long, 20 feet wide, with one arch in the middle and macadam two feet above the high water mark. The bridge was located near Julien Lariviere's property at upper village lot 13, or the site of the present Washington Street bridge, thus giving residents of the main village access to the church and courthouse. Two years later, Lariviere was paid in full for building the bridge. In 1841, Henry Brandes was paid for his work on the St. Friole bridge, but by 1843, the bridge was declared unsafe and in need of repairs. In 1846, a new bridge was started at the site of present Court Street, but it was changed, probably to the site of the old bridge. County commissioners' records noted in 1848 that the bridge was finished in the previous year, and the unnamed contractor was still owed \$400. In 1869, another bridge at this site was arranged for.

Originally, the main access to the island was at its northern end, but in 1857 A. McDonald built a substantial bridge on Bluff Street, now Blackhawk, which was becoming the primary business street on the mainland. The bridge building thus reflected the development of the city as a whole. Just as the heart of the city moved from the Washington Street area a few blocks south to Blackhawk on the mainland, the bridge to the island moved also.

When agricultural products of the farmlands across the Mississippi to the west increased, Prairie became more important because it provided a direct link with Milwaukee and eastern markets. Until the late 1850s, Prairie du Chien's economic success relied on steamboat traffic up and down the Mississippi. The first steamboat, the Virginia, arrived in 1823, and soon Prairie was a regular

stop for many ships. As many as twelve steamboats stopped there in one day (Scanlan, 193). The steamboats were vital to the transportation of local goods to markets, as well as facilitating the importation of staples, finished goods, and people to Prairie.

The steamboat's pre-eminence, though, was challenged by the railroad, which had reached Prairie du Chien on April 15, 1857. The Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad first used a depot in Lowertown, and crossed the Mississippi by loading cars, freight and passengers onto ferries (WMH 21:444). In 1864, the railroad, now known as the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, moved the depot to the island, as the previous location had lost its accessibility to the river through silting. The new depot, still standing today, was located near the first ferry landing at village lot 19. The railroad was important not only for transporting the tide of immigrants west, but also for sending produce to market. During the Civil War, the need for agricultural products became greater than ever before in the East, at the same time that the traditional way of sending products to market, down the Mississippi to New Orleans, was prevented by a blockade. The railroad thus became a vital link to markets in Chicago and the East. The waterfront of the main village was significantly transformed with the addition of a large grain elevator, train depot, and warehouse, and docks to handle river traffic. The Dousman House, called the Railway House when it was built (fig. 4) in 1864, is representative of the hotels and taverns that soon dotted the waterfront and provided the services required by the numerous businessmen and workers at the busy terminus of three modes of transportation: train, steamboat, and barge. In addition, building of dwelling houses increased markedly in the main village, and the city shared in a general post-war prosperity.

In 1870, a bird's-eye map of Prairie du Chien was printed (map 4). This view, besides showing individual buildings in great detail, also illustrates Prairie's growth as a city. The three original parts of the city are still clearly delineated. The main village is now the busiest, with steamboats, trains, mills, and elevators all operating. Multi-story buildings, indicative of hotels and commercial buildings, line both Water and Second Streets. There is just one bridge to the mainland, at the present Blackhawk Avenue, which is also lined with multi-story buildings on the mainland. The largest concentration of residences is found just north and south of Blackhawk on the mainland. Separated by the almost vacant Fort Crawford tract, Lowertown is sparsely developed, with some blocks vacant and others packed with large buildings. Despite large undeveloped sections, Prairie du Chien appears to be a thriving town. Just after 1870, the last of the great houses on the island was built. This is the second Villa Louis, an Italianate mansion built by H. L. Dousman's widow (fig. 5). The 1876 map, showing the same concentration of development seen in the 1870 map, is peppered with advertisements indicating the optimistic outlook of Prairie's business community (map 5).

In the 1870s, the method of transportation changed once more, when a bridge to carry the trains across the river was built. Born in Ireland, John Lawler came to Prairie du Chien in 1857 as station agent for the railroad, and worked his way up to become a general agent. In 1874, he developed his famous pontoon bridge, which allowed the railroad to cross the river. This bridge,

which he patented, consisted of a pile bridge built from both shores and across the island in the middle, with an opening in both channels of the river. Two huge pontoons operated by steam power were able to swing open to permit river traffic to pass through (Evans, 225). This first bridge ran north of the Villa Louis over to North McGregor, now known as Marquette, Iowa. Some time in the twentieth century, the bridge was moved to a location farther south on the island, approximating the route of the present bridge crossing the river at Prairie du Chien.

After the 1870s, Prairie's importance as the Mississippi River terminus for the railroad and the transfer point for goods shipped across the river or down it by barge, ferry, and steamboat diminished. The Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis at the Falls of St. Anthony increased in size and population, dominating the upper Northwest trade routes. The midwestern agricultural empire to the west necessitated more efficient transportation routes that bypassed Prairie du Chien. The population of the city stabilized, increasing slightly from 2700 in 1870 to 3232 in 1900. The development of woolens and button industries supplemented the city's agricultural bases, as industrialization of Prairie occurred in the late nineteenth century. More importantly, Prairie's significance as the ancient outpost in the Old Northwest Territory waned as the frontiers of the nation advanced farther west.

VILLAGE LOT HISTORIES

The owners of main village lots are clearly denoted by Isaac Lee in 1820, Lucius Lyons in 1828, and the American State Papers. The ownership of the entire island is explained and proven until 1820, but it is less clear what happened to the island after 1820. Generally, it has been assumed that these patentees divided their lands and sold off lots in the 1820s or 1830s, but a closer examination proves that this is not so.

In 1820, the island was divided into main village lots, which ran across the island from the Mississippi River in the west to the Marais de St. Friole in the east. Of the thirteen main village lots that are occupied today (13 through 25), only two, lots 15 and 24, were divided at all before the 1850s. The others, which each had a different owner in 1820, were bought up by wealthy interests before they were subdivided. For example, in 1840, Joseph Rolette owned lots 16, 19, 20, and 21. The American Fur Company owned lots 14 and 18 in 1830, and Hercules L. Dousman owned lots 13 and 17, as well as several lots to the north, in 1840.

If these original landowners, most of them French Canadians, had wanted to make a profit, they would have platted their land and sold off small lots, as the Americans did in Lowertown as early as the late 1830s. Instead, these men were content to build their houses near the river and hold onto their large lots until speculation connected with the arrival of the railroad induced them to sell. The main village was not platted until 1853, and it was not until the late 1850s that any small portions were sold off.

This late subdivision has two effects. First, it seems unlikely that very many privately-owned houses were built in the main village before the 1850s. That the landowners' large houses dominated the waterfront is still apparent today, and a network of outbuildings can be assumed. But if the land behind the waterfront was built up, it must have been by tenant houses, for none of the land was sold. Secondly, because the land was subdivided so late, it is extremely difficult to determine when these tenant houses might have been built. Because one owner's land includes five or six city blocks, the records are not clear as to what is occurring on any particular lot.

Below is a brief narration of what happened to each village lot from 1820 when the American State Papers confirmed the claim, to the time when it was subdivided, usually in the 1850s. The mainland had the same pattern of development, although different sections were subdivided at different times. These early histories are included in the individual inventory sheets (maps 7, 8). Deedbook references are in parentheses (book/page).

Village Lot 13

The American State Papers confirm to Nicholas Boilvin ownership of main village lot 13 (ASP 4/873). Boilvin was assigned as Indian Agent to Prairie du Chien by the Governor of Louisiana in 1808 (Scanlan, 171). He served in this post until 1827 and was a major supporter of American interests during

this time. He acquired lot 13 from the estate of John Campbell, his predecessor, in 1804 (Scanlan, WMH 27:149). Lot 13 was 194 feet wide, fronting on the Mississippi River and, like all the village lots, extending east to the Marais de St. Friole.

In 1824 (A/72), Boilvin sold this house and furnishings to Oliver N. Bostwick, an agent of the American Fur Company, who immediately sold to Samuel Abbott, also of the American Fur Company (A/75). As Scanlan suggests, Abbott may have befriended Boilvin, for Boilvin was using the Agency house as late as 1826, and his successor was using it the following year (Scanlan, 106). In 1835, Abbott sold the entire lot 13 to Hercules L. Dousman (B/140), and in 1845 Dousman sold it to Edward W. and Champion Pelton (E/376). By 1850, E.W. Pelton, who was born in Massachusetts and came west in 1836, owned \$25,000 worth of real estate, far more than any other resident of Prairie (1850 census).

In the 1853 Main Village Plat, lot 13 was divided into seven blocks bounded on the south by Bolvin Street. The first tax records in 1857 indicate that these seven blocks were owned by E. W. Pelton and assess their value at \$7,000 including a "Mill Property." In 1858, Pelton began selling off individual lots from his seven blocks (M/441). The 1870 bird's-eye view of Prairie du Chien shows a three-and-one-half story steam-powered mill on the banks of the river, and the 1876 map labels this structure "Flouring Mill, J. Famechon."

Village Lot 14

The American State Papers (4/873) attribute village lot 14 to the American Fur Company, directed by John Jacob Astor, Ramsey Crooks, and Robert Stewart. The lot had belonged to the Michilimackinac Company, traders, who merged with the Astor interests in 1811 to form the Southwest Fur Company which the American Fur Company eventually dominated (Scanlan, 87).

The patent of village lot 14 was protested by John W. Johnson, the U.S. factor. The American State Papers record his protest in which he stated that he rented the Southwest Fur Company's building on May 27, 1816, but on June 21, Brigadier General Smith took possession of the buildings for the United States. Johnson continued to occupy the building as public property, and he erected other buildings and made improvements, the value of which he estimated at \$3,000. The protest was denied.

Johnson's building probably did not include the rock warehouse now on the site (Scanlan, 106). The 1829 view of Prairie shows a building different from the present structure. In 1834, Astor sold out his interest in the American Fur Co. to Ramsey Crooks. In 1842, a new American Fur Co. was formed, headed by Hercules L. Dousman in Prairie du Chien and Henry Sibley in Mendota, Minnesota, and it rented Rolette's stone store on village lot 16. This American Fur Co. was active in Prairie until 1864 (Scanlan, 112).

In 1850 (F/483), Ramsey Crooks, George Ehringer, and Steven A. Halsey, as directors of the dissolved American Fur Co., sold village lot 14 "together with the tenements," or rented buildings, to Bernard W. Brisbois for \$300. When platted in 1853, village lot 14 formed the southern side of Bolvin Street. Brisbois began selling individual lots in 1858.

Village Lot 15

The widest of the main village lots, number 15, was patented to Michael Brisbois, a trader (ASP 4/874). Brisbois, a French Canadian, came to Prairie du Chien in 1781, and was one of the first white settlers and landowners. He was commissioned in the Prairie du Chien militia in 1809 by the Governor of Illinois, and then charged with treason after the War of 1812 for sympathizing with the British. In 1822 (A/27), Brisbois mortgaged his lot to the American Fur Co. His lot was then described as being 500 feet wide, fronting on the public street, and "having on said lot a dwelling house, stable, outhouses, etc."

After Michael Brisbois' death in 1837, village lot 15 was divided lengthwise into three separate portions. In 1848, the northernmost 210 feet frontage, running east to the marais, was sold at the auction of the estate of Domitelle Brisbois, widow of Michael, to Ann, widow of Charles Brisbois (F/139). In 1853 (G/302), when she sold this property to H. L. Dousman for \$2,000, she was called Ann Hermaringer. This northern portion of lot 15 comprised the northern side of Brisbois Street when it was platted in 1853.

The middle section of lot 15 was sold by Domitelle Brisbois to her son Bernard W. in 1841 (E/45). It had 123 feet frontage by 550 feet depth. This is the lot on which the Brisbois house, an impressive stone structure, was built at about this time. In 1852 (G/75), Bernard acquired the land to the east of this from his sister-in-law Ann Hermaringer so that his property then ran from the river to the marais. When platted in 1853, this section formed the south side of Brisbois Street.

The southern section of lot 15 was 100 feet wide and had been sold by Michael Brisbois to Joseph Rolette in 1835 (B/69). Rolette also owned lot 16, which adjoined this one on the south. H. L. Dousman acquired this lot in 1847 (F/130) after a court case. When platted in 1853, this southern 100 feet of lot 15 had no frontage on an east-west street, but instead ran through the middle of the blocks between Brisbois and Fisher Streets. Dousman sold individual lots beginning in 1858.

#### Village Lot 16

The American State Papers confirm to Francis Bouthellier ownership of main village lot 16 (ASP 4/874). According to the stated claim, in 1820 Bouthellier, the agent for the Southwest Fur Comapny, had acquired this lot in 1792 at the auction of the Michael Bouthe estate. Lot 16 is described as being 179 feet wide and bound on the south by an alley, now Fisher Street. Though lot 16 was mortgaged twice (A/60, 140) and seized by the sheriff and sold at public auction to pay damages incurred by an individual for whom Bouthellier, Brisbois, and Louis Musick had stood surety (A/90), Bouthellier redeemed lot 16 each time (A/123, 158) and owned it as his death.

In 1834 (A/501), Joseph Rolette bought lot 16 at the auction of Bouthellier's estate and before he died had built on it both a two-story residence and a stone store used by the American Fur Company. In 1840 (D/292), Rolette mortgaged lot 16 and other real estate to B. W. Brisbois in trust for his wife, Jane Fisher Rolette, in order to guarantee her annuity of \$800 agreed upon when they separated. This act mentions that village lot 16 and 100 feet on the south side of lot 15 were the same site "on which the store of the American Fur Company is now located." This store was probably the largest building in the main village when it was built about 1835. Popularly referred to as the Hudson Bay Company store, although there is no evidence that they ever owned it, the building was two and one-half stories, stone, rectangular, and had five bays with a center door and twin gable-end chimneys. In 1842 (E/92), Joseph Rolette sold to his daughter Elizabeth "all within the east and west boundaries of lot 16, and south of the line drawn six feet south of the stone store aforesaid (American Fur Company), and to include the new frame dwelling house now being erected by me."

H. L. Dousman, who had married Rolette's widow in 1844, purchased the mortgaged lots, including lot 16, at an auction of the estate of Joseph Rolette. On July 13, 1847 (F/130), he paid \$2,000 for five farm lots and main village lot 16 and part of main village lot 15. Dousman later acquired the claim of Henry Brandes to "a certain two-story frame dwelling-house...which I built for Joseph Rolette deceased and which was sold to me to pay my lien on it for work done and materials furnished" (F/144). Known as the Rolette House, this frame-with-brick-nogging dwelling still stands today. In 1864, Dousman began to sell off lots from main village lot 16.

#### Village Lot 17

The American State Papers confirmed title of village lot 17 to Joseph Rolette, who had acquired the lot September 27, 1819, from Jean Baptiste Ferrebeaux (or Faribault) (A/18). When Rolette mortgaged this property to his brother Hypolite in 1823 (A/35), the act noted that it was 130 feet wide and bound on the north by the public road, now Fisher Street.

In 1821 (A/12), Joseph Rolette deeded part of this lot to the County of Crawford "in consideration that the County erect thereon a County Jail & Court House." The portion conveyed began 900 feet east of the western boundary of lot 17, ran east to the marais, and was  $111\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide. The county did erect a jail of hewn oak logs, 25 by 26 feet, with two sections, one for criminals and one for debtors (Evans, 180). It burned in 1834 (Snyder, 202).

In 1824 (A/70), Rolette sold to Jean Baptiste Pion the part of lot 17 fronting on the river and running 900 feet east. Pion sold the whole lot 17 "with all buildings" to Hercules L. Dousman in 1835 (B/133). In 1853 (G/172), Dousman sold the front 900 feet of this lot to Thomas A. Savage, reserving land on the north boundary needed to widen the street to 60 feet. In 1864 (17/526), Savage, a promoter of and investor in the railroad, sold six lots in the west end of lot 17 to the Milwaukee and Prairie du Chien Railway Company, where they erected the Railway House, now known as the Dousman House or Hotel. He held onto his other lots until the 1880s.

#### Village Lot 18

The American State Papers confirm title of main village lot 18 to the heirs of James Aird. According to the stated claim, this 128-foot-wide lot was owned in 1793 by Francois Rucker, who sold it to Jean Baptiste Barthelette, who in turn sold the lot to Joseph Rolette, from whom Aird purchased it. Aird was a licensed trader who worked for a fur company based in Montreal (Scanlan, 95). He was born in Scotland and died in 1819, reportedly by choking on some wild rice (Brisbois, 294).

In 1821 (G/518), lot 18 was sold at auction for \$1,000 to J. J. Astor, Ramsey Crooks, and Robert Stuart of the American Fur Company. J. J. Astor withdrew from the Company in 1834 but Ramsey Crooks and Stephen Halsey continued to operate the firm until 1850 when the company was dissolved. In 1853 (G/201),

Crooks and Halsey sold lot 18 to H. L. Dousman who sold it the same year (G/324) to Frederick J. Miller. In 1855 (H/165), Miller began to sell individual lots off the property.

#### Village Lot 19

According to the American State Papers, in 1820 village lot 19 was patented to Marshal Mann, who had occupied it continually for 25 years. Mann ran a hotel on this lot (Scanlan, box 5), and the Lyons Plat of 1828, which has primitive drawings of houses, shows a somewhat larger structure on lot 20. Scanlan believes that when Judge Doty held court here in 1823, it was in Mann's hotel (Scanlan, box 5).

In an 1824 act recorded in Louisianaville, Missouri (A/65), Mann sold his lot, including "a dwelling house, stables, outhouses, etc.", to Jean Brunet, representing Brunet & Despouse, for \$500. In 1823 a tavern license was issued to Brunet & Despouse (Scanlan, box 5). Brunet bought out his partner in 1825 (A/115), paying him \$800 cash and \$200 in lumber or a boat. Brunet ran a hotel and tavern there, and after the massacre in 1827, settlers stayed at the hotel because there was a stockade around it (Scanlan, box 5). On the site of this hotel, the railroad depot stands today. Brunet also ran a ferry across the Mississippi to Iowa from the west end of this lot.

In 1829 (A/249), Brunet sold lot 19 to William M. Read, the sutler at old Fort Crawford who was still living in the fort in 1831 (Scanlan, box 5). Read immediately mortgaged it back to Brunet, who turned the mortgage over to someone else. Henry K. Ortley finally obtained it in 1832 (A/452, 407, 409) and took possession from Read. Ortley sold lot 19 to Joseph Rolette in 1835 (B/142). At an auction resulting from a suit concerning Rolette's heirs, Charles L. Learned acquired lots 19, 20, and 21, and sold them in 1845 (E/447) to Alexander S. Hooe of the U.S. Army in trust for his wife Emilie Rolette Hooe. She sold half of her interest in these lots to Benjamin F. Fay in 1856 (H/90, K/283), and they both began selling off individual lots soon after. Fay became Prairie du Chien's first mayor when it was incorporated in 1872. Lot 19 was 135 feet wide, and after platting in 1853, ran through the middle of the blocks between Rolette and Fisher Streets.

#### Village Lot 20

In 1820, the American State Papers confirmed title of lot 20 to Charles Lapointe, stating that the lot had been occupied for the last 25 years. Lapointe ran the Franklin House, a hotel and tavern, on this lot at the site of the present McClure's tavern (Scanlan, box 5). In 1821 (A/6), Lapointe sold the 96-foot-wide lot to Joseph Rolette for \$650. When Rolette mortgaged this lot to his brother in 1823 (A/35), lots 20 and 21 contained four dwelling houses and two stables.

Like lot 19, this lot was auctioned after Rolette's death and changed hands until it ended up in the joint ownership of Emilie Rolette Hooe and Benjamin F. Fay, who sold off individual lots after 1856. After platting, lot 20 was

located on both sides of Rolette street.

#### Village Lot 21

The American State Papers confirm title of main village lot 21 to Joseph Rolette (ASP 4/875). The lot was described as being 180 feet wide, and fronting on Water Street. Rolette purchased this lot in 1816 from Basil Giard, who had lived on lot 21 since 1788 (A/21). According to the deed of sale, the lot contained two houses, one of which was for offices, and dependencies. Giard was an early settler of Prairie du Chien and was one of the three men on behalf of the trading community at Prairie to whom Governor Sinclair, the British governor of Mackinac, granted formal possession of nine square miles of prairie north of the Wisconsin River's mouth in 1781 (Scanlan, 70). Rolette owned this lot until his death in 1841 and lived in a house constructed on this site (Oerichbauer, 85).

Like lot 19, this lot was auctioned after Rolette's death. It changed hands until Emilie Rolette Hooe and B. F. Fay became joint owners in 1856, and they both began to sell off individual lots soon after. After platting in 1853, lot 21 was just south of Rolette Street.

#### Village Lot 22

When the British evacuated Prairie du Chien at the end of the War of 1812, they burned Fort McKay behind them. American troops returned to Prairie du Chien in 1816 to rebuild the fort, which was renamed Fort Crawford. Colonel Chambers removed the occupants of the sites he wanted, by exchanging their lots for ones south of the main village (Scanlan, 125). James McFarlane, who owned lot 10, had come from Pennsylvania in 1808 (Scanlan, 86). He was granted lot 22 in exchange for lot 10, as seen in the American State Papers (4/875).

After McFarlane's death in 1826, Rolette acquired lot 22 and "dwelling house" (A/163). In 1847 (F/95), Thomas Owens acquired this lot from the estate of James Hendricks. He formed a brief partnership with John H. Londerman in the ownership of this land, but bought him out in 1855 (H/34). Owen sold the entire lot 22 to John Lawler in 1864 (18/473), and Lawler, agent for the railroad, sold off individual lots soon thereafter. The 120-foot-wide lot 22 ran through the middle of the blocks between Rolette Street and present Blackhawk Avenue.

#### Village Lot 23

The American State Papers confirm title of lot 23 to Antoine Lachapelle in 1820 (ASP 4/875). Lot 23 had been given to Lachapelle in 1816 by Col. Chambers in exchange for lot 9. Lot 23, described in the original patent as being 72 feet wide, was owned by the LaChapelle family until it was sold in 1852 by Antoine's son, Pierre LaChapelle, to Josephine Brisbois, the daughter of Michael Brisbois (G/62). By 1859, Josephine and her husband Joel D. Jones

bad begun to sell off individual lots (N/174). After platting in 1853, lot 23 ran between the present day Blackhawk Avenue and Rolette Street.

#### Village Lot 24

The narrowest of the village lots, lot 24, was only 50 feet wide. As early as 1825, it was bound on the south by a street, which was moved in 1857 to village lot 26, where it forms the present Blackhawk Avenue. As recorded in the American State Papers (4/875), Francois Galorneau obtained title to lot 24 in an exchange with Col. Chambers for Fort Crawford land.

In 1825 (A/105), Galorneau, or Gallerno, sold part of this lot to Jacob Forsenot for \$12. The land conveyed was 50 feet front by 376 feet depth, and was located in the east of lot 24, being bound in the east by the prairie leading to the marais. Jacob Forsenot's widow Mariah married Era Putnam and in 1845 (F/45) the Putnams sold to Benjamin Boudrie a 50 by 150 feet section, bound on the east by the rest of the Putnams' property, and on the west by the part of lot 24 that Gallerno had not sold to Forsenot. After Boudrie's death, Charles Weidemer bought up the interests of the Boudrie heirs between 1857 and 1865 (K/158, M/33, 20/265) and he sold off individual lots soon after.

The rest of the Putnams' holdings measured 50 feet by 276 feet, and were located in the easternmost end of lot 24. This they sold to Alonzo Pelton for \$50 in 1853 (G/154). In 1867 (24/62), Pelton sold this property, which had been platted into two lots, to Charles Weidemer.

In 1836 (C/44), Francois Galorneau sold to Hyacinth St. Cyr all of lot 24, although he had previously sold all but the west 80 feet. This was not changed in the acts until 1845 (E/324) when Michael St. Cyr's property was seized in a court action. At this time the lot was described as being 50 feet wide by 80 feet, bound on the east by Boudrie. This small lot was appraised at \$100 by two disinterested parties. Theodore Bugbee acquired the lot at the sheriff's auction in 1848 (F/324) and his heirs, all from New England, sold the lot for \$1,000 to Thomas A. Savage in 1856 (I/312).

#### Village Lot 25

The American State Papers confirm title of lot 25 to Josepb Crele (ASP 4/875). Pierre LaPointe and Michael Brisbois testified that Col. Chambers had given Crele this lot in exchange for lands seized in 1816 for use by the U.S. Army. Lot 25 was described as being 62 feet wide.

In 1830, Joseph Crele (or Crelly) sold lot 25 to Francois Labatte (A/305). The deed of mortgage stated that the property included one building and improvements (A/308). Three years later Labatte sold lot 25 to James Reed (A/487). According to Scanlan's research (box 5), Reed had obtained a tavern license in 1823 and opened a hotel here in 1834, a year after purchasing lot 25. When Reed bought lot 25, its northern boundary was a public road that

crossed the island from river to marais. In 1857 this road was moved to the south of lot 25 and is the present Blackhawk Avenue.

In 1846 (F/48), Reed sold lot 25 to Michael Gauthier, who sold the south half of the lot in 1851 (F/502) to Michael Bernatz, whom the 1850 census listed as a baker. The deed states that a two-story building was included on this portion of the lot. The remaining northern portion of lot 25 was sold to the Gauthier children and contained a one-story building (F/96). In 1857 (L/76), Bernatz began to subdivide his portion of lot 25.

### TYPES AND STYLES

The buildings in the project area are invariably simple in style and modest in size. By no means are they representative of Prairie du Chien architecture as a whole. The most elaborate examples of architecture in Prairie, such as the Villa Louis and the Dousman House, are in the Fourth Ward but excluded from the project because they are already entered in the National Register. After 1850 or so, or the time that current architectural styles began to be reflected in Prairie buildings, the more fashionable addresses were on the mainland and out of the project area. What remain for this study are mostly vernacular buildings, designed for comfort and not style, built for shelter and not to make a statement, yet revealing of how the ordinary resident lived.

Whole areas of architectural development characteristic of the rest of the city are not found in the project area. For example, the local buff-colored limestone rock, seen in important buildings such as the county courthouse, rock Fort Crawford, and the Diamond Jo Warehouse, was not used in any of the modest residences in the project area although it is found on the island in several of the buildings already on the National Register. Whole architectural styles, such as Gothic Revival and Italianate, are not found in the project, but they too are certainly present in the rest of the city. Nor could any architects be identified, although that does not mean that there were none. Many of these houses, however, were probably designed and built without an architect.

Some sense of style is reflected in these simple houses. The Greek Revival gives way to the irregular floor plans of the Victorian Gothic, which yields to a flurry of bungalow building around the First World War. Many of the houses possess a timeless quality, though; they could really have been built at any time. They are solid and well-built, yet flexible enough to adjust to many families. The most common feature of houses in the project area is the enclosed porch, revealing a gradual adding on, sometimes in several directions. The simple rectangular house, either one or two stories, is expanded by an addition to the rear or to the side, in which case it becomes an L-shaped house. Then the space in the angle is filled in with a porch, which eventually is enclosed, and the house is square again. Yet out the rear another porch has been added, expanding the house again. With this expansion as the norm, a house is never quite finished, because there is no ultimate state.

Yet what is most important about the architecture of the project area is not the style but the type. Because the project area includes the part of Prairie du Chien that was settled first and continues to be occupied, it has the potential for including the earliest type of construction techniques. Although no colonial French building types were found, two houses of horizontal squared timber construction are indicative of early 19th century building. After about 1840, framed construction came into use, as well as brick. The styles that became popular are perhaps better represented outside of the project area, but the types of building, important to an understanding of Prairie du Chien's development, are found here.

The building materials reflect local availability. Wood, of course, was most common, and of that, oak and pine predominant. Much of the timber came from Iowa across the river, and other locations upstream, because the village's immediate surrounding area was soon depleted. In 1819, Inspector General A. P. Hayne noted while visiting Fort Crawford that, "The great difficulty is to obtain fuel. They have to go 6 miles for wood" (Scanlan, 126). The steamboats also consumed vast quantities of timber which had to be imported. Nonetheless, wood was the easiest material to obtain. Concerning the construction of rock Fort Crawford, Scanlan (p. 138) notes that "brick was burned extensively in Prairie du Chien, the clay along the bluffs being used for the purpose," and that in 1829, 80,000 bricks were burned. Despite this availability of brick, Newcomb (p. 127) says that the first brick house in the State was built in 1840 in DePere, and the first documented brick house in Prairie was the Folsom House of 1842. Also, it was not uncommon to bring bricks from St. Louis by steamboat, as H. L. Dousman did for the building of Villa Louis. The red brick of the 1840s was replaced by the more popular Milwaukee buff brick of the 1870s, but none of the latter is found in the project area. Today, the twentieth-century fondness for fake-brick asphalt siding is all too apparent in the project area.

The earliest documented building in Prairie du Chien is the American Fur Warehouse, a stone structure listed on the National Register, and built about 1830. While it is generally acknowledged that an 1807 flood destroyed most of the buildings in the town at that time, it is also possible that the high water of 1826, which forced the troops to evacuate old Fort Crawford (Scanlan, 137), might have done similar damage to the town. At any rate, no building in the project area that stylistically or structurally might belong to the 1820s or earlier could be found. Located just outside the project area, however, the Strange Powers House at 338 N. Main Street is a fine example of French colonial building techniques. This house is constructed of vertical square timbers mortised into a square timber still. Between these vertical posts, which are spaced about four feet apart, are horizontal round poles, apparently once covered with whitewashed clay. The Strange Powers House is thought to date from the early 1820s.

An idea of what the British-ruled, French-influenced Prairie du Chien might have looked like can be gained from the travelers' reports, which Oerichbauer has reprinted. But by excerpting just the portions relating to building style and construction type, a clear picture emerges. Thomas Anderson, 1800: "Except one framed one, the houses were all built of logs, plastered with mud, and covered either with cedar, elm or black ash bark" (Oerichbauer, 75). Lt. Zebulon Pike, 1805: "...part of the houses are framed, and in place of weatherboarding there are small logs let into mortises made in the uprights, joined close, daubed on the outside with clay, and handsomely whitewashed within" (Oerichbauer, 76). In 1856, J. H. Lockwood described Prairie in 1816: "The houses were built by planting posts upright in the ground with grooves in them, so that the sides could be filled in with split timber or round poles, and then plastered over with clay, and white-washed with a white earth found in the vicinity, and then covered with bark, or clapboards, riven from oak" (Oerichbauer, 90). Obviously, the French type of construction found in the Strange Powers House once dominated the village of Prairie du Chien.

Fort Crawford, heralding the arrival of United States governance, was built of horizontal squared timbers in 1816 (Oerichbauer, 82). This type of construction was subsequently used in Prairie for at least forty years. Introduced to colonial America by Scandinavians in Delaware in 1638, the log cabin had become the typical American frontier dwelling by the time of the American Revolution (Shurtleff, 4). It was a natural construction type for a wooded countryside, and needed no tools other than those used in felling the trees, namely an axe (Newcomb, 48). Even after the establishment of Prairie's first sawmill in 1819 (Scanlan, box 5), houses continued to be built of logs, although they were often covered with clapboards.

Unfortunately, for the two log structures identified in the project area, construction dates are difficult to determine. Merilla Coorough's house at 419 Fifth Street (File #62) was moved to its present site in 1900 from an undetermined location northwest of the Villa Louis. In its original state it was a rectangular, one-and-one-half story, gable-roofed building, with the entrance in the center of the long side. The logs were squared and laid horizontally, neatly dovetailed at the corners. The other log structure is at 113 Villa Louis Road (#33), and it could have been built as late as the 1860s. It has two and one-half stories, but like the other one, it is rectangular with the long side toward the street and a gable roof. As far as could be determined, it too has horizontal squared timbers, but in the basement the floor joists are seen to be round. Nonetheless, for a frontier style, these log structures are the best demonstration of Prairie as a frontier settlement.

As Rexford Newcomb noted (p. 126), the log cabin was the principal structural type in the old Northwest until the introduction of the Greek Revival style. This style reached Prairie by 1840 and continued in use until after 1860. But its influence was exceedingly subtle: no columned porches or pedimented gables can be found in the project area. Instead, the style is reflected in rectangular buildings with gable facades, which hint at a temple form, and occasional returns on the gables, reminiscent of a pediment. The Greek Revival style's tendency towards simplicity meshed easily with the simple vernacular of frontier Prairie du Chien.

One of the most delightful examples of the vernacular Greek Revival is the small brick building at 210 Villa Louis (#26). Its rectangular shape and gable front are reminiscent of a Greek temple, as is its site on a mound. This house has a three-bay facade with one window in the gable. Two other nearby houses are similar, but with a slightly steeper roof pitch. These are 215 Villa Louis (#24) and 109 Villa Louis (#35), which also have a three-bay gable facade with a single window in the gable. All three of these buildings are probably contemporary and could dated from the 1840s. A fine example from the 1850s is the two-story three-bay house with a side-hall entrance at 222 Villa Louis (#22); the doorway has rectangular sidelights. Gable facades continued to be popular into the 1860s and 1870s. The houses at 200 Villa Louis (#28) and 219 Fourth (#54) are similar, both exhibiting two-story, two-bay gable facades, and both built in 1867. This same type is seen with ells at 128 Villa Louis (#30) and 1403 S. First (#135); these both date from about 1870. One-story three-bay gable-facade houses are found in the twin buildings

at 116 and 112 Villa Louis (#34 and #36), from 1871. The houses at 122 Villa Louis (#31) and 1420 S. Main (#127) might have been similar when they were built in 1867, but they are now altered. One embellishment traceable to the Greek Revival style is returns on the gable, which is seen in three two-story buildings dating from the 1870s. These are 120 S. Villa Louis (#43), 512 Bolvin (#75), and 314 Bolvin (#73).

One could argue that these simple buildings are purely vernacular, uninfluenced by any style, and that a gable facade does not a temple make. But it is indisputable that nearly all of the houses built between 1840 and 1870 had gable facades. The prevalence of a style, or an accepted building design, is obvious when the twenty-five buildings in the project area dating from 1840 to 1876 are compared: their similarity is striking. Furthermore, the lack of architects meant that builders were responsible for design. Rexford Newcomb noted:

The majority of Wisconsin's early builders come from the East; hence they were versed in the Greek Revival, which was then popular. They based their work upon the handbooks of Asher Benjamin and Minard Lafever, which they imported, from time to time making such changes as were dictated by life in the West, the climate of the new country, or the materials employed. The result was an indigenous type of Greek Revival different from that of any other state of the Old Northwest (p. 127).

In Prairie du Chien, it seems as though the builders omitted all Greek Revival ornament, but were content with the classical form.

After 1875, there was little building in the project area, and what there was tended to be simple. Although some gable facades persisted, these were often found in two-story, L-shaped buildings, such as 230 Villa Louis (#21), 212 Fourth (#55), 209 Fisher (#88), 416 Fifth (#64), and 419 Villa Louis (#70). Only one house has the varied facade and projecting bays that are associated with this period of architecture: 312 Fourth (#49), built at the early date of 1871. This reflects the fact that the more ostentatious building was being done on the mainland, out of the project area, after 1875.

A hint of the Gothic Revival is seen in the appearance of the cross-gable roof. Although none of these roofs are so steep as to earn their houses a claim to being in the Gothic Revival style, these roofs are undoubtedly influenced by picturesque Downing cottages. The houses are all large two-story structures, and are located at 120 S. Villa Louis (#43), 314 Bolvin (#73), both from the 1870s, 206 Fourth (#57) from 1880, and 217 McLeod (#141) from 1890. Particularly of interest is 314 Bolvin, which is a square building with jigsawed window surrounds and corner pilasters.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, building activity increased in the project area. By and large, these new buildings were in the bungalow style, a simple one-story functional house, often featuring a front porch. These bungalows are neither exclusive to the area nor do they display any regional characteristics. Instead, they represent a kind of mass-market

architecture, foreshadowing the popularity of pre-fabricated housing. Examples of the bungalow abound. Those with gable facades are: 227 Fourth (#51), and 231 Fourth (#50), 122 Second (#9), 124 Second (#8), and 316 Villa Louis (#19). Bungalows with hipped roofs are 408 Villa Louis (317), 324 Fourth (#47), 328 Villa Louis (#18), 410 Villa Louis (#15), and 309 Bolvin (#71). Hipped-roof bungalows with hipped-roof dormers are: 101 Fourth (#61), 414 Villa Louis (#14), 400 Fourth (#46), 404 Fourth (#44), 418 Fifth (#63), 106 Villa Louis (#37), and 403 N. Main (#115).

The bungalow paved the way for architectural styles popular after World War II: the ranch-style suburban-type home, often pre-fabricated, and its cousin the mobile home. Both of these are simple one-story structures that stay close to the ground, and they reflect not only their bungalow predecessors, but also the simple styles prevalent in the project area.

Because of the frequent high water in the project area, interiors of almost all the houses have been much altered. Many homeowners attributed their wood panelling or sheetrock interiors to the fact that the 1965 flood damaged plastered walls beyond repair. Floors are generally carpeted wall-to-wall or covered with linoleum. In addition, the necessity of raising furnaces and hot-water heaters out of the basement accounts for some of the one-story additions. But the extreme plainness of the woodwork and lack of any architectural detailing is attributable more to a preference for simplicity reflected on the exterior as well, rather than to alterations since construction.

Any observations on architectural style have to be accompanied by two words of warning. First, it must be remembered that the project area is not representative of Prairie du Chien as a whole, and that its development was erratic enough to eliminate whole eras of architectural style. Secondly, any style is boiled down to its simplest level in the project area. Ornament is rare; interior detailing even rarer. Architectural styles are seen in shape and massing rather than embellishment or detail. As such, these buildings probably represent the vernacular more than anything else. They are simple buildings, influenced by styles, but wholly the work of the local builder.

SUMMARY

The historical and architectural resources of the flood control project area in Prairie du Chien were investigated. The primary conclusion was that little remains of French-influenced architecture, even though French-Canadian people and culture dominated the village until after the War of 1812. Despite a military outpost here, United States influence was not apparent until the 1820s. Perhaps because of damage from frequent inundations, no buildings dating from before that time seem to have endured. The French Canadians, who owned most of the land in the project area in 1820, held onto this land in its entirety, and did not subdivide until the 1850s. This decreased the likelihood that many buildings would date from before this time.

Three buuildings were found that should be declared eligible for the National Register. These were two log structures and one rare red brick one, all important for their method of construction. Building dates for these structures were difficult to ascertain, but one log house may date from as late as 1860. In addition to these three, twenty-four other buildings were named as having some degree of historic value. It was recommended that a historic district for these twenty-seven buildings be considered, because their importance in relation to the whole is greater than their significance alone. Other recommendations included a neighborhood museum to preserve something of the Fourth Ward as a neighborhood, and possibilities for interpretation of the island as a whole historical museum. It is strongly urged that measured drawings of the three significant buildings, and photographic recording of the twenty-seven preferred structures, be undertaken.

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The following residents of Prairie du Chien were most helpful to this study.

Three local historians:

Don Munson, Curator, Villa Louis.  
June Steiner, amateur genealogist.  
Griffith Williams, President, Crawford County Historical Society.

Residents and former residents of the project area:

George Benish, 1420 S. Main  
Lou Cardin, 209 Fisher  
Merilla Coorough, re 419 5th Street  
Mrs. Charles Fernette, re 309 Bolvin  
Lawrence Fernette, 504 Fourth  
Mrs. Louis Fernette, 315 Bolvin  
Amy Cokey, 106 Villa Louis  
Emma Cokey, 205 Villa Louis  
Mrs. Lester Hubbard, 109 Villa Louis  
Frank Kozelka, re 310 Brisbois  
Fay Marie McClure Moore, re 136 N. Water  
Dorothy Obmascher, re 113 Villa Louis  
Dorcas Olson, 200 Villa Louis  
Ceneva Olson, 215 Villa Louis  
Joe Pitzer, re 310 Brisbois  
Cora Reed, 210 Villa Louis  
Elizabeth Vance, 108 S. Villa Louis  
Mrs. Vern Webster, re 122 Villa Louis  
Zella Welsh, 128 Villa Louis  
Cappy West, re 113 Villa Louis

A special thanks to Dale Klemme

#### PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was prepared by Alison K. Hoagland and Bradley Frandsen, of the Historic American Buildings Survey, in 1978.

APPENDIX A:  
Illustrations

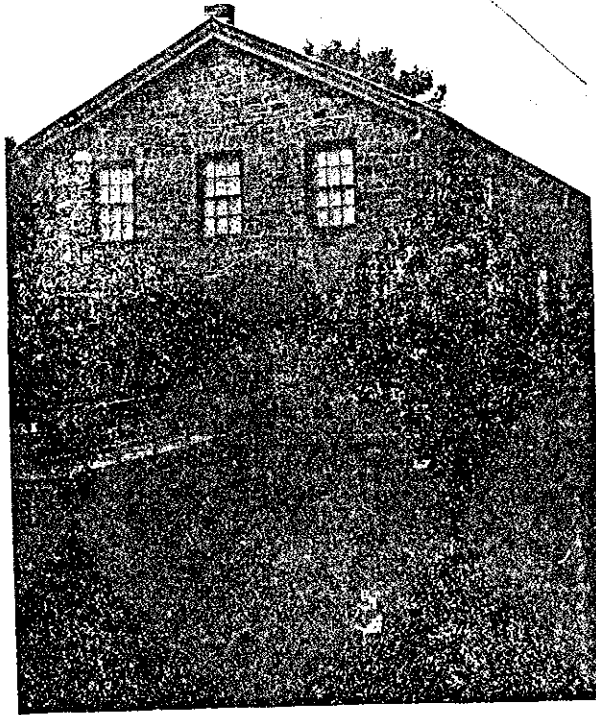


Fig. 1 AMERICAN FUR WAREHOUSE



Fig. 2 BRISBOIS HOUSE

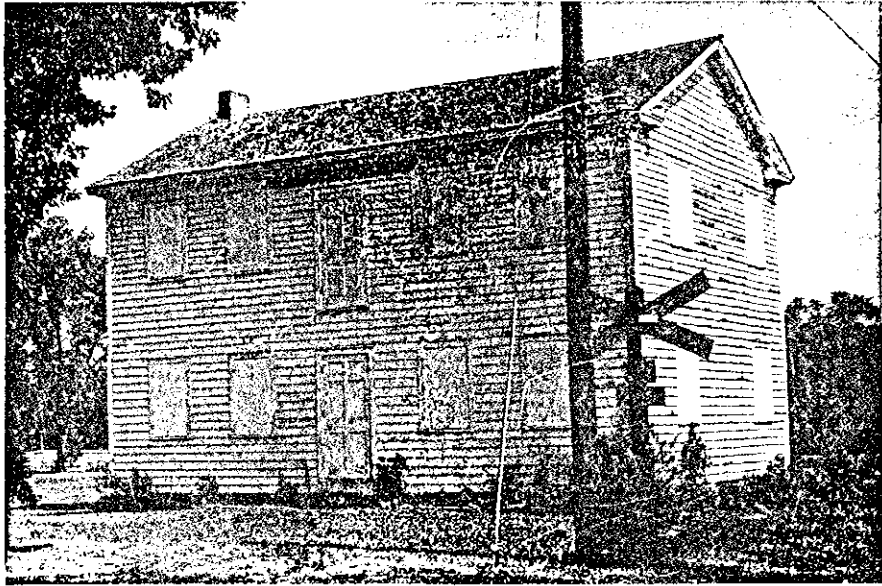


Fig 3. ROLETTE HOUSE.

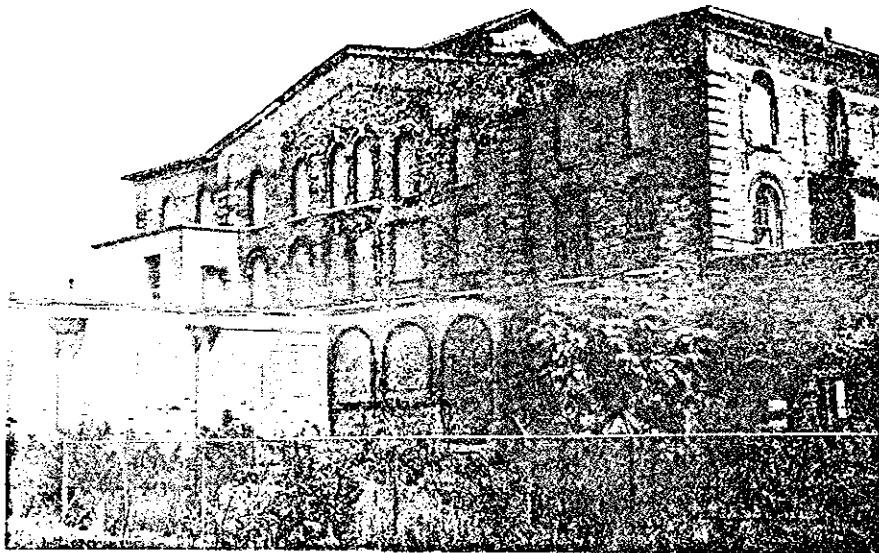


Fig. 4 DOUSMAN HOUSE

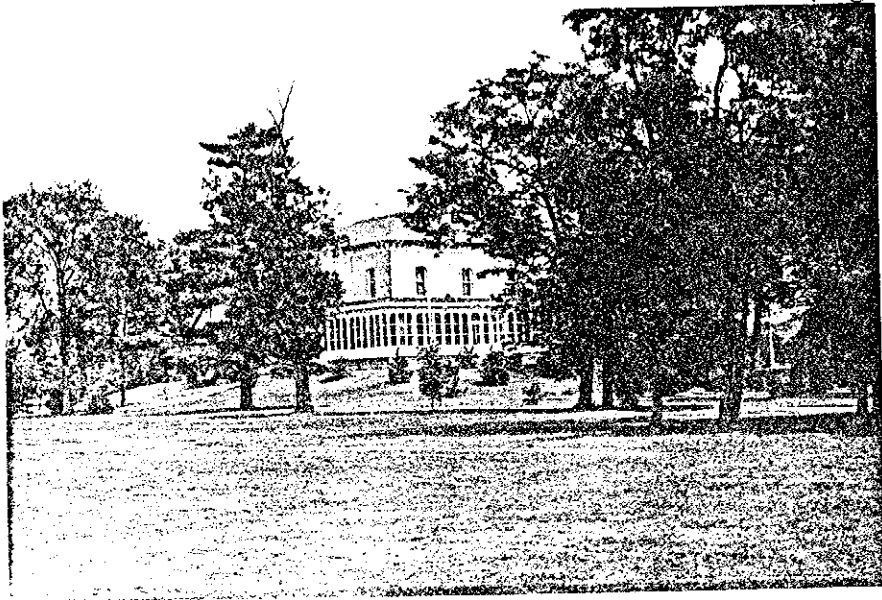


Fig. 5 VILLA LOUIS

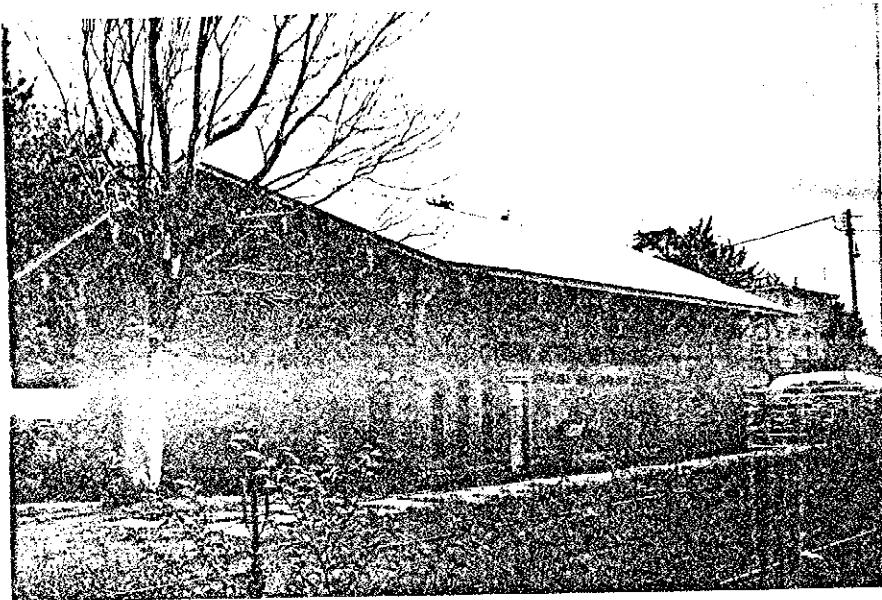


Fig. 6 CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE & ST. PAUL  
RAILROAD DEPOT

*Prarie du Chien. Post Crawford - Prairie du Chien 5 1/2 Miles above St. Louis*

*Oct. 1829*

Figure 7

Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, October 1829, by Seth Eastman. Xerox from State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Photograph of original drawing in David I. Bushnell Collection in the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.